

*Nguyen Quynh Trang  
Debra Efroymson  
Nguyen Khanh Linh*

*Growing up  
Puberty  
Blossoming* ?

*PATH Canada*

***Community Health Cell***

Library and Documentation Unit

367, "Srinivasa Nilaya"

Jakkasandra 1st Main,

1st Block, Koramangala,

BANGALORE-560 034.

Phone : 5531518







### *A note from the translators:*

This book was originally written and published in Vietnamese. In order to enable others to read the book and possibly to use the material, we have prepared this translation into English. We wished to render as far as possible the tone of the Vietnamese, which can make for awkward English, for which we apologize.

Because the book was written for Vietnam, it contains various information, quotes, and cultural slants that are specific to that country. If it were to be used in other countries, adaptation would be needed, and the quotes replaced with people's verbatim comments from that country.

We hope that you find the book of use. If you would like to get in touch with us, please contact us at one of the addresses below.

Debra Efroymson  
Nguyen Quynh Trang

Sian FitzGerald  
Executive Director  
PATH Canada  
1 Nicholas Street, Ste 1105  
Ottawa, ON K1N 7B7  
Canada  
fax: (613) 241-7988  
tel: (613) 241-3927  
e-mail: [path@synapse.net](mailto:path@synapse.net)

Debra Efroymson  
Regional Advisor  
PATH Canada  
273/1 Jafrabad  
Shangkor, Dhaka-1207  
Bangladesh  
fax: (8802) 912-2831  
tel: (8802) 913-1965  
e-mail:  
[pathCan@citechco.net](mailto:pathCan@citechco.net)

Tran Thi Thu Huong  
Projects Officer  
PATH Canada  
23-25 Dang Tien Dong  
Hanoi, Vietnam  
tel.: (844) 823-6360;  
(844) 857-1193  
e-mail:  
[pathCan@netnam.org.vn](mailto:pathCan@netnam.org.vn)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*This book required the effort of many people. We would first like to specially thank the more than 300 people who participated in focus group and individual discussions. We warmly thank the sociologist Dr. Vu Pham Nguyen Thanh who carried out a large part of the research, which was the first step in creating this book.*

*We extend a very hearty thanks to Mr. Dao Tran Phuong, Ms. Tran Thi Thu Huong, and Ms. Tran Hanh Dung, who helped so much in research and in forming the structure and outline for the book. A warm thank you to the artists Mr. Nguyen Huu Khoa and Mr. Nguyen Manh Hung, who put so much effort into the illustrations.*

*An important thank you to all the medical, sociological, and literary experts who helped us with drafts and contributed their valuable ideas. They include Dr. Tran Ngoc Kinh, Dr. Nguyen Cong Nghia, Dr. Tran Nhat Hien, Dr. Do Hong Ngoc, Dr. Nguyen Kim Tong, Dr. Nguyen Duy Hung, Dr. Dao Xuan Dung, Ms. Theresa Shaver, Dr. Phan Bich Thuy, Dr. Nguyen Cong Binh, Dr. Le Minh Giang, Ms. Khuat Thu Hong, Ms. Bui Thu Thuy, Dr. Jamie Uhrig, Ms. Kate Bourne, Ms. Nina McCoy, Ms. Miranda Wheeler, Dr. Nguyen Thi Tuan Anh, Dr. Nguyen Thai Thuy, Mr. Pham Thanh Van, Dr. Tran Huu Ngoan, Dr. Nguyen Xuan Hong, Dr. Nguyen Thi Y Duyen, Dr. Song Ha, Dr. Nguyen Cao Cuong, Ms. Danh Thanh Huong, Ms. Duong Thi Thu Ho, Ms. Vo Thi Trinh, Ms. Vo Thi Chanh, Ms. Tran Thi Cam Ha, Dr. Dang Thi Nhat Vinh, and Mr. Nguyen Thanh Van.*

*A special thanks to Mr. Nguyen Tran Huy, Mr. Bui Chi Cuong, Mr. Tran Tuan Long, Mr. Pham Tuan Anh, and Ms. Nguyen Thanh Thuy, who put so much effort into helping us gather opinions during the pretesting, and a very warm thanks to the over 100 friends who spent their time thinking and answering our questions about the drafts.*

*We would also like to thank all the people whose names we don't have or cannot list here, who contributed to creating this book.*

*A last and very important thanks to Canada Fund and the Royal Netherlands Embassy for their financial support to this project.*



## GROWING UP? PUBERTY? BLOSSOMING?

*Yes. This is the age when so many magical things happen, the age when your body goes through amazing changes. Recently just a little girl or a little boy with snot running down your nose, running around on bare feet with no shirt on, bathing naked out in the yard, now you seem to have changed your skin and your flesh. Adults seeing you often say you look like a male or female youth. Also at this age, our temperament seems to change. Some problems, some questions seem unanswerable. This age is troublesome, but it is also worthy of pride, as we are growing and maturing. It's correct to call it the age of blossoming.*

*Adults sometimes don't take much notice of this age. It was long ago when they went through it. Parents may think their children are growing all the time, getting a few centimetres taller every year, so now there's nothing different. But that's not true. Puberty is an outstanding step of development. It happens because your brain orders your ovaries (if you are female) or your testicles (if you are male) to do their work. These organs secrete sexual hormones, which affect both your body and your thinking. That's why many things happens that are worth mentioning. By reading this book you will know more about yourself and your friends, and you will be proud of this age of growing up and avoid many incidents of misunderstanding, fear and faults.*

# CONTENTS

<b>Magical happenings in boys' bodies</b>	1
Change in your physical appearance	1
Development of the reproductive organs	1
Male reproductive organs and their operations	2
Erections	3
Ejaculations	4
Wet dreams	5
Underpants	6
Hygiene of the reproductive organs	7
Swelling and pain in the breasts	7
Facial and body hair	7
Shaving	7
Adam's apple	8
Breaking of the voice	8
<b>Magical changes in girls' bodies</b>	9
Change in your physical appearance	9
Development of your breasts	9
Structure of a mature woman's breasts	10
Bras	12
Development of the reproductive organs	12
Female reproductive organs and their operations	13
Onset of menstruation	15
How to deal with menstrual blood	16
Menstrual pain	16
The menstrual cycle	17
Vaginal secretions	19
Hygiene of the reproductive organs	20
Hair	20
<b>A few things boys and girls may be interested in</b>	21
Oh heavens, why am I so ugly?	21
Acne, flashlights, automobile lights, or... revolting seeds of love!!!	22
Smelly armpits	23
Playing with yourself	24
Why do people have babies?	24



Why am I a boy and you a girl?	26
<b>New features in your relations with parents</b>	28
Separating yourself from your parents' protection	28
Sometimes arguing with your parents or disobeying them	29
Children and parents should try to understand each other	30
<b>New features in friendships</b>	31
Friendship widens and becomes deeper	31
Shy and ... self-confident	33
<b>Awareness of sexuality</b>	34
Turbulent feelings of teens	34
Awareness of your body and of sex	35
<b>Some things we youth should think about</b>	37
To smoke or not to smoke?	37
One phenomenon deserving reproach	38
How to relate to "the special opposite sex friend"?	39
<b>Knowledge teens should have</b>	42
The harms of tobacco	42
Avoid sexual abuse	43
Safer sex	44
Contraceptive methods	44
Sexually transmitted diseases	48
HIV and AIDS	50
<b>Appendices</b>	52
Good books for teenagers	52
Answers to some questions about menstruation	52

# MAGICAL HAPPENINGS IN BOYS' BODIES

## Change in your physical appearance

Just recently you were only a little boy, but now you look like a real young man. Your height increases considerably, your shoulders widen, your stomach and your hips become thinner, your muscles get bigger. You start puberty later than girls but you will catch up and outpace them when it's your turn.

For Nam this change has been gradual, since age 12 or 13, but Quang only started growing at 17, and he has grown so fast...

*... that someone said: "Oh, Quang, I don't recognise you any more. It's been just a few months, and you now look like ong Tay [a foreign man]."*

Some teens start growing earlier than others of the same age. Some are still very "childish" but bigger than all the others. Some are wise early but the tiniest in the class. There is nothing to worry about, as each person develops in his own time.

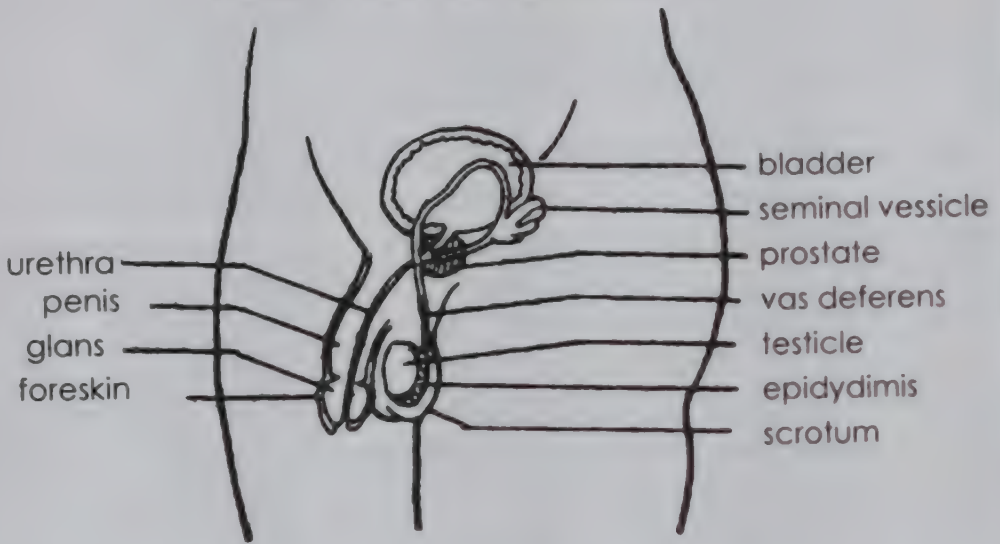
## Development of the reproductive organs

At puberty, your reproductive organs change quite a lot. Your scrotum gets bigger and darker. Your two testicles also get bigger. Your penis grows bigger and longer, and often gets darker too. And hairs appear, at first just a few, then more come up and they get more curly.

Don't be surprised if you have a chance to see a penis of a friend your age and find that it does not look like yours. People are all different forms, so "that thing" is quite diverse in terms of colour and shape. One person's penis has fair skin, that of another is dark. Some penises have a large glans and a small shaft, some vice versa. You should know that the size does not matter. In the usual (limp) state, penises may differ widely in size, but when they are erect, smaller penises get quite a lot bigger, while bigger ones don't change their size very much. Therefore, size does not affect your sexual ability or reproductive ability.



## MALE REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS AND THEIR OPERATIONS



First we have to mention the *penis*, the male sex's famous organ. This is a multi-functional organ, which is used for urinating and has sexual function as well. The penis is very sensitive, especially the *glans* (head of the penis), which has the highest concentration of nerve endings in the whole body. The *foreskin* is the loose sheath of skin protecting the glans. When you were small your foreskin was tight, and later it loosens. If it does not loosen and can't be pulled towards your body, you should go to a hospital so that a doctor will cut it for you, which helps your washing and prevents cancer.

Testicles are also big for some people and small for others, hanging high for some and low for others. Usually one testicle hangs lower than the other, so that they don't rub against each other. For some people the left one is bigger, for others the right one is. In the old days some tailors were even so careful as to ask which side you "lean" to so that they would make pants that fit right! We wonder whether any tailor still does that.

Your reproductive organs develop and at some point, your testicles start producing sperm, and your seminal vesicles and prostate start secreting fluids for your semen. You may ejaculate... And you should be careful, because you now are able to make a baby.



Inside the penis are porous areas which may change dramatically. At the normal state, your penis is soft and small, but when blood comes and fills these areas, it becomes hard and erect, which is called an *erection*. When blood leaves, your penis goes back to the soft and small state.

You have two oval-shaped *testicles* inside your *scrotum*. From puberty onwards, your testicles work as two factories regularly producing sperm (male reproductive cells). They hang outside your body because sperm production requires a temperature lower than that of the body. The scrotum is elastic, moving away from the body to cool down when it's hot, and moving towards the body for warmth when it's cold, so as to maintain this temperature. Besides, the testicles also secrete male sex hormones, which determine male sex characteristics and regulate the operation of your reproductive system.

Two *epididymis* are on top of the testicles. These are the places for perfecting sperm which come from the testicles, and also warehouses for storing sperm.

From each epididymis there is a tube leading up, called the *vas deferens*. Via the two vas deferens, sperm leave the epididymis and start their journey. On the way, sperm meet with the seminal vesicles and the prostate. The *seminal vesicles* and the *prostate* secrete fluids which nurture sperm. These fluids mix with sperm into what is called semen, which is cloudy white like milk.

The final part of sperm's journey is the *urethra* (inside your penis), which is the way out for semen, and also for urine.

## Erections

Erection of the penis is a natural phenomenon. When boys are small, there are times when their penis is erect, but when they reach puberty, many boys have headaches wondering why it becomes erect so often and why erections occur.

## EJACULATIONS

Ejaculation means semen from inside your reproductive system spurts out. In the process of growing up, at some point the boy starts to have the ability to ejaculate. You may ejaculate because your penis is stimulated to the point of orgasm. But many times you ejaculate while there's no stimulation, often at night, which is called a wet dream.

The semen of each ejaculation contains a few hundred million sperm. Why so many? The reproductive purpose requires that many. Though you need only one sperm to combine with one egg (female reproductive cell) to form an offspring, sperm have to travel a long difficult way, during which trip their number decreases tremendously. They have to compete among themselves, which is why they should be numerous so that the winner which meets the egg is truly strong and healthy.

Everyday your body produces a certain amount of sperm. If you ejaculate many times in the course of a day, the semen of later ejaculations contains less sperm. If you don't ejaculate, sperm is reabsorbed by your body.

Some friends question, "The urethra is the route for both ejaculation and for urination, so do semen and urine ever mix on the way and come out together?" No, that doesn't happen, because at the cross-roads where the path of urine (from the bladder) and the path of semen (from the seminal vesicles) meet, there is a valve which closes one path while the other is in use, just like traffic lights work on the road to prevent collisions.

Is there any problem? Actually this is simply the "training" period. Your penis may "lift its head" for any silly reason, when you are thinking about something happy, when you have a thought about your female friend, when you are worried or afraid, when you need to urinate, when you get up in the morning, or for no reason at all.

*Sometimes when I'm having a nice chat with my girlfriend, it gets up. Also it seems whenever I'm called on by a teacher it happens and my face is all red.*  
(Chien, 18 years old)

Don't worry. When you grow up, your penis will no longer be so "undisciplined", and will only become erect when there is sexual desire. And anyway, other people don't notice your erections.

Erect penises have many different shapes, curving up, curving down, and with different angles.



Some erect penises

## Wet dreams

A wet dream is an unintentional ejaculation which happens at night. This is a common occurrence at puberty, and a sign that you are "grown". Like any event that happens the first time in life, it confuses many boys:

*I remember the first times I had wet dreams I didn't dare take a shower when I got up as I was afraid my parents would find it out and I would be embarrassed. Those days my parents washed all my clothes, so they were very surprised that their son insisted on doing it himself.*  
(Hung, 17 years old)

*At first I was worried about it. I feared I had a disease and that I might not be able to have children later. But after marrying, I had a child immediately, so I stopped worrying, because it must be normal, don't you think? Now I still have that about once a month or a month and a half.*  
(Nam, 32 years old)



Wet dreams mean your body gets rid of sperm. Though called “dreams” they don’t only happen when you’re dreaming.

*All my friends have wet dreams, be it often or rarely. Some have it every five or seven days, one once a month, but not every month or every week. Some dream of women, some say they fall asleep when they’re tired and it comes out, and they just feel their pants are wet when they get up... It’s so funny.*

(Nam, 20 years old)

Not having wet dreams is also normal. 26-year-old Hiep who is married said,

*I hear my friends talk about dreaming at night and ejaculating in their pants... I do dream about relations with women but it never comes out, yeah, I never find my pants wet.*

Some friends are worried that not having wet dreams means their bodies don’t produce sperm. That’s not true. Your body always produces sperm, but if not ejaculated, sperm are reabsorbed and your body makes new sperm.

Parents who have sons reaching the age of puberty should definitely explain to them about wet dreams early on, because many young friends don’t dare ask anyone and worry so much as to lose their sleep and appetite because of this very normal happening.

## Underpants

Many young friends have never worn underpants, so they are at a loss when they reach this age. Not wearing them is uncomfortable, especially when the penis “stands up”. Actually there’s nothing difficult about it. You can ask an older brother or uncle to buy them for you, or go buy them yourself. It doesn’t matter whether they’re boxers or bikinis, whether loose or snug. That depends on your personal preference. You just need to be sure to choose underpants that are absorbent, cool, and comfortable to wear. Synthetic material like nylon often makes your reproductive organs feel itchy and uncomfortable. Tight underpants stick to the skin and make you hot, which can affect sperm production.

## **Hygiene of the reproductive organs**

Starting from puberty, you should pay special attention to the hygiene of your reproductive organs. Around the glans is the place where sexual secretions collect, as well as drops of urine and sweat. You should wash your genitals daily, pulling back the foreskin to wash carefully. Hygiene is the first requirement for maintaining health.

## **Swelling and pain in the breasts**

Puberty is a wonderful time, but also creates many confusions. Because of hormones many male friends' breasts seem to pop up, swell a bit, and hurt. And many friends rush to lose their appetite and sleep as they fear they are turning into girls. Since when is it so easy? Don't worry, it will go away after a short time.

## **Facial and body hair**

Pubic hair (hair around the genitals) usually sprouts first, starting with a few, then more and curlier. Some people have only a few hairs, others have more, or have hair going up to their stomach and down their thighs and their anus. Armpit hair, leg hair, and even chest hair starts to appear. Facial hair generally sprouts one or two years after body hair. Everyone has a different quantity and type of hair. Don't anyone be so silly as to judge masculinity by the amount of body hair, as that's completely wrong.

## **Shaving**

Most guys learn how to shave from their father or older brother, and have no difficulty. But there are also those like Minh: "I stole my father's razor and shaved, and cut my face", who need to know a few things:

You should use a sharp razor, as it will be easier to shave and won't irritate your skin. Before shaving, moisten your face with water to make your facial hair soft. Warm water is best, but don't use hot water, as hot water makes your skin taut and easily cut. It's even better if you have shaving cream. When shaving, move the razor down according to the

direction of the hairs (if you shave from the bottom up it will be a closer shave, but it can irritate your skin). After shaving, wash with cool water to soften your skin. Clean your razor after use, and leave it to dry. Don't dry it with a towel, as that will quickly make it blunt.

At present electric razors have just appeared. This kind of razor is not like a razor blade. If you use one, make sure your facial hair is dry. The drier it is the easier it will be to shave.



## Adam's apple

The Adam's Apple is thyroid cartilage. Changes in male hormones during puberty cause it to change, and therefore your Adam's Apple becomes more noticeable in your throat.

## Breaking of the voice

Puberty causes your larynx to grow, and your vocal cords to become thicker and longer. Your voice changes. This is why pubescent boys sometimes experience embarrassment because of their breaking voice.

*My voice broke in 7th grade. I was sent by the school to read the poetry of Pushkin when my voice suddenly became hoarse, it was so embarrassing. Now whenever I meet a boy whose voice breaks I know immediately and find it funny.*  
(Dung, 24 years old)

Some people may unthinkingly tease you that you sound like "a duck quacking" or "a tobacco pipe breathing". Just laugh it off, don't let it bother you. The voice only breaks for a certain period, and you will soon have "the warm voice of a man".



# MAGICAL CHANGES IN GIRLS' BODIES

## Change in your physical appearance

The physical appearance of girls changes greatly during puberty, if early starting from 9 years, if late from 14 years. During the years before menstruation starts, your height increases greatly. After menstruation begins, your breasts stand out, and your behind is fuller than before. The layer of sub-cutaneous fat is thicker and makes your body softer and feminine.

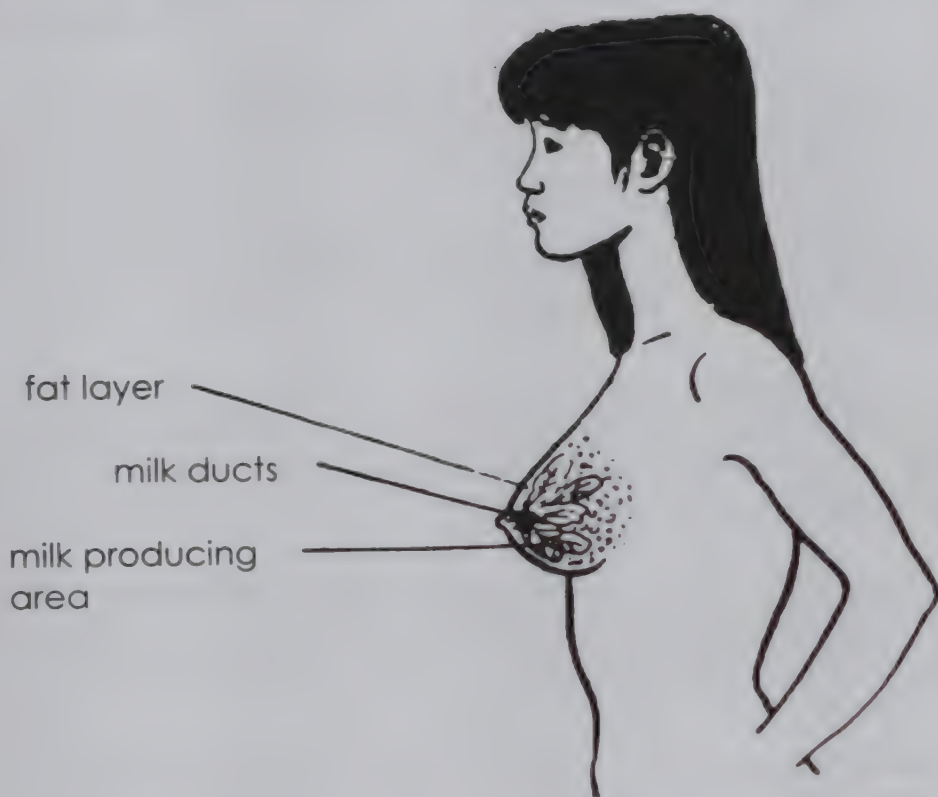
This process occurs at different speeds in different people. Some girls grow gradually, while others grow suddenly "as if they have eaten expanding powder". Your body has many changes during these years. Perhaps you feel you are at one time fat, at another time thin. Usually around age 18-20 you will reach a stable appearance.



## Development of your breasts

The milk glands develop, and the layer of fat in the breasts becomes thicker and makes your breasts stand out and continually be fuller. This first sign of development is usually the areola (the dark area around the nipple) becoming fuller and darker. Afterwards the breasts stand out with a pointed shape, and gradually become bigger and more round. While they are developing, the breasts may itch or feel a bit sore. Everyone's body starts to develop in its own time, so it's hardly surprising that some people's breasts are big while others are still "like a boy".

## STRUCTURE OF A MATURE WOMAN'S BREASTS



A mature woman's breasts are mainly fat. Fat protects, and also makes the breasts soft and attractive. Breasts have no muscle, but they adhere to the chest muscle above the ribs, and are supported by the muscles in the area and by the ligaments which join them with the bones in the neck, arms, and ribs. The nipples are areas with concentrated nerve endings, thus sensitive to stimulation.

Inside the breasts is the milk production system. This system contains about 15 to 25 lobes, each of which has milk-producing areas which resemble bunches of grapes, and tree-shaped ducts that enter the main ducts leading to the nipples. When a girl reaches puberty, this milk production system begins to develop but doesn't yet produce milk. When the woman is pregnant, the system develops completely, so that after childbirth, the milk-making areas produce milk which travels through the ducts for the child to suck.

*My breasts started to come up in 4th or 5th grade.... At that time I didn't want them to come up, so I pressed them, I pushed them down all the time...*  
(Hong, 18 years old)

*When I was in 9th grade I still ran around half-naked in the street. Nobody believes me when I say it, but it's true. I had no breasts at all. Only in 11th grade did I start to develop...*  
(Hanh, 20 years old)

As with the colour of the skin, everyone's shape, colour and size of the areola and nipple are different:

*I have a friend whose nipples are big, as big as the big toe, and its colour is really dark. When she was 18 everyone thought she had a husband and children, but she hadn't even dated anyone. My breasts aren't too bad, but my nipples are only the size of the tip of my little finger.*  
(Binh, 21 years old)

There are also people whose nipples don't emerge from their breasts. Don't worry that you won't be able to breastfeed. You will learn how to pull your nipples out, it's easy.

The two breasts usually develop unevenly. If you notice that only one side stands out, relax, the other side will soon follow. And just as you often have one hand that is bigger than the other, many people's mature breasts are bigger on one side. You need to know that and not worry or feel unhappy.

*My right breast is bigger than my left. I used to think I was deformed or something. I would always stuff a handkerchief in one side of my bra. I would walk around bent over so that nobody would notice. Of course nobody else noticed but I saw it so clearly. Now from walking around bent over my back is hunched. Much later I read a book that said a lot of people are like that, and only then was my mind at rest. Since then I almost never wear a bra anymore.*  
(Tham, 21 years old)

Older people may talk about pie-shaped breasts and melon breasts, but in reality nobody's breasts are shaped like that. There are just big breasts, small breasts, nipple which stands straight out, nipples which go to the sides, round breasts, breasts leaning to the sides, breasts with a few hairs, breasts without hair, etc. So many women and so many different breasts. Also please don't worry that you won't have much milk because of sma



breasts. Milk comes from the milk glands inside, and everyone's milk glands are alike. Size only depends on the subcutaneous fat, and has no effect on milk.

## **Bras**

When their breasts develop to a certain point most girls start to wear a bra, perhaps to hide their breasts, or to protect their breasts, or to look attractive, or to be like their friends. Girls have many questions: is it good to wear a bra? What kind of bra should we wear?

If your breasts are big and soft, you should wear a bra. If your breasts are small, or large but sturdy, then you don't need one. Of course when playing sports, running and jumping, regardless of whether your breasts are large or small, you should wear a bra to prevent your breasts from being bounced around. A good bra is one that fits properly: the elastic around your trunk is just tight enough, the straps fit, and the cup fits. If it's just a little loose the bra will lose its supportive effects, but if it's too tight, it will reduce blood circulation and keep your sweat from evaporating.

## **Development of the reproductive organs**

Your reproductive organs are no longer like those of a little girl. The labia majora, labia minora, and clitoris all grow, pubic hair sprouts around the vulva, and the vulva becomes darker. Inside your body, the vagina and uterus also develop, and begin their functions.

Just as every face has eyes, a nose and a mouth, but everyone looks different, the reproductive organs are one original part with each person. Don't worry if your labia minora seem big, your clitoris seems long or your hair is different from others'.

## FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS AND THEIR OPERATIONS

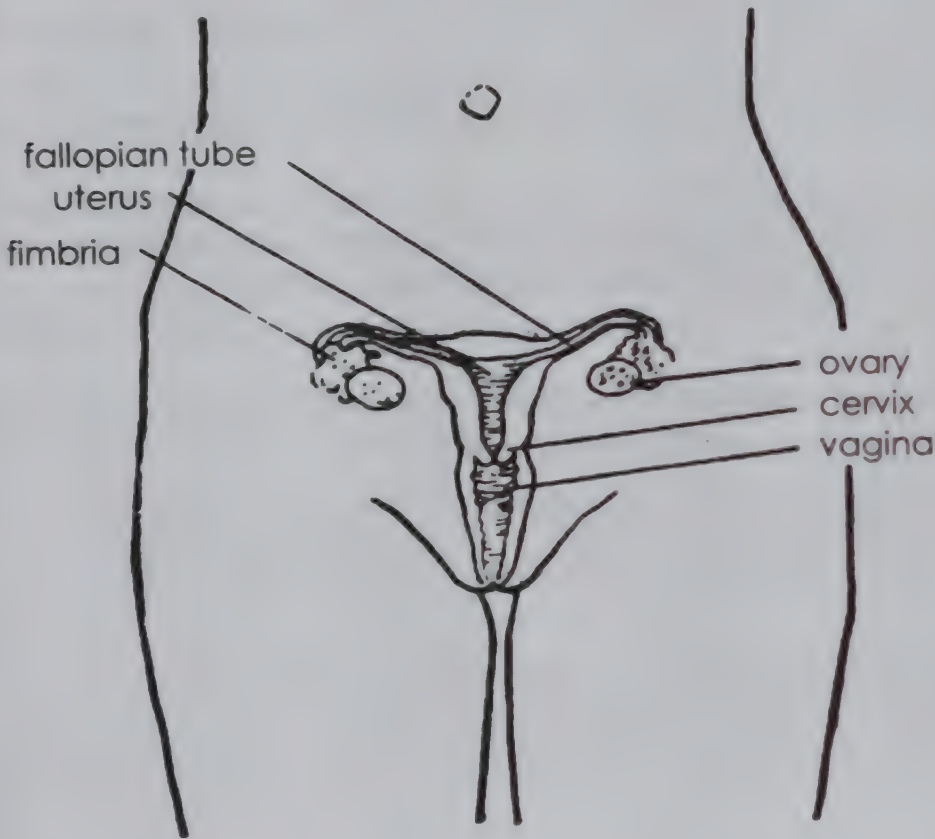
You only need a small mirror to see your reproductive organs clearly. The whole external reproductive area is called the *vulva*. Take a look in here, you can see your pair of *labia majora*, and inside the pair of *labia minora*. These two pairs protect the reproductive system.



Right at the top of the labia minora is a small peak, the *clitoris*. To be more precise, it is only the tip of the clitoris, whereas the whole clitoris lies inside the body, and has a long shape. The clitoris is very sensitive, being the place where the largest number of nerve endings meet.

Below the clitoris and the urinary opening is the *vaginal opening*, which leads to the inside reproductive tract. Looking at the picture on the next page, you see the vagina at the bottom. The vagina is a long hollow cavity which is highly elastic. When the woman has sex, the vagina opens to receive the man's penis. When you give birth, it stretches wide for the baby to come out.

You see two small oval-shaped ovaries. They store about 400,000 eggs (female reproductive cells) from when the girl is born. Puberty is also the time when the eggs begin to function. According to a cycle, the eggs develop and you ovulate (that is, the eggs leave the ovary—see the next section). The ovaries perform the important function of producing reproductive hormones, which regulate the body's sexual physiology.



The two *fallopian tubes* each have one end which opens like the fingers on the hand, called the *fimbria*. The fimbria receives the egg when it comes out from the ovaries. The two fallopian tubes lead to the *uterus* (also called the *womb*). The uterus is the cavity where the baby lives before birth. The uterus connects with the vagina through the *cervical opening* (or *os*), which is tiny, with a diameter of only 1-2mm, but which opens up greatly when you give birth so that the baby inside the uterus can move to the outside.



## Onset of menstruation

Some girls may start menstruating from age 10, while others don't start until age 17 or 18. This is the sign that your reproductive organs have started functioning. From this time you have the ability to have children, so that in the future you'll become a mother like your own mother. Because this is an enormous change, normally parents tell you about it before it happens. But sometimes parents think that you are still too small, or don't know how to explain it, so they don't talk to you. Thus, when menstruation starts, everybody has different thoughts and reactions. Some people "already know too much", while for others, "oh my lord, what's that?" Some are embarrassed, and others are very proud.

*When I was going to school I was very close to my female teacher. That day I slept in her house and felt that my pants were wet. I kept wondering what it could be. At that time I was already 17, but I didn't think of it.*

(Lan, 23 years old)

*I got my period in the 6th grade. My mother told me that when I reached that age I would get it, so I wasn't scared or worried at all.*

(Hang, 19 years old)

*I thought I was like everyone else, that I had also matured. Because at the time I was the smallest, so I was proud, I felt it proved that I was grown up.*

(Tam, 20 years old)

*I felt really terrible, really afraid, I hid it and felt terrible. I felt so ashamed, so embarrassed. ... I stole some cloth from my mother to use. I climbed up to the roof to wash it, I would close the door tightly, I was afraid people would know.*

(Huong, 20 years old)

So clearly when parents realize their daughter is about to reach this age, they should explain about menstruation. Our female friends told us:

*In the future when I have children, I will tell them. Even the father should talk to his child a little, before she gets it. I really liked seeing the film "One person against the Mafia" that had Inspector Catani. When his daughter started to menstruate he was so affectionate towards her, I really liked it. Or in the film "The Thornbird" Father Ralph explained to Maggie that this is the time when girls move to the next stage, I felt it was really good. I think that parents should talk a little so their children know, so they can prepare themselves emotionally. I was really afraid that day.*

(Huong, 20 years old)

*I noticed that day that there was blood on my pants, I was terrified and asked my mother. My mother was great, she told me immediately, "Congratulations, my daughter has become a woman." That evening she went home and told my father, like a special event.*

(Tam, 19 years old)

Naturally if your parents are uncomfortable and embarrassed and don't talk to you, you still know that it's the sign that you are maturing. It's something to be very proud of, no?

Please see the box "The menstrual cycle" on the next page.

## **How to deal with menstrual blood**

Young women have many ways to absorb menstrual blood. There are manufactured sanitary napkins (the most widely-used product at present), cloths, towels, medical cotton... The important thing is that they all be clean and you wear snug underwear so that the pad is tight against you.

Blood is by nature very clean, but when it comes out, blood is a good environment for bacteria. For this reason your vulva sometimes will feel itchy when you're menstruating. You should change the pad at least four times a day (when you get up in the morning, at noon, at twilight and before going to bed). Each time you change it, you should wash yourself with clean water (you can also use a little bath soap) and dry yourself. Only wash on the outside, as washing on the inside can cause infections. If you use cloth, soak it with soap and wash it well, and hang it somewhere sunny and not dusty. It's great if you can use a hot iron.

## **Menstrual pain**

Some girls get abdominal cramps, backache, headache, and so on, before and during menstruation. This is due to prostaglandin, which the body secretes to cause uterine contractions, which helps get the uterine lining out. If you have a lot of prostaglandin, you will feel a lot of pain, and may even be nauseated and get diarrhoea. If you don't have a lot of prostaglandin, you will only feel mild cramps or will not feel unpleasant at all. It is still not known why some people have more prostaglandin than others, but menstrual pain is not a disease. Many pubescent girls have cramps because the body's hormones have not become stable.



## THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

The reproductive system's activities follow a cycle: the egg leaves the ovaries in order to meet sperm (if there is any), the uterine lining thickens to prepare a nest for the egg, and in case the egg doesn't meet sperm the nest destroys itself (*menstruation*) so that a new nest can be formed. In all of these actions, only menstruation is noticeable from outside, so the beginning of menses is used as a mark in calculating the *menstrual cycle*. If you start your period on the 25th of March, and again on the 27th of April, then the time from the 25th of March to the 26th of April is one menstrual cycle.

The menstrual cycle usually lasts somewhere between 21 and 35 days. Most women have cycles that vary in length by a few days, and times when their period fluctuates by a week or two. In puberty-age girls, the period is not yet steady, and doesn't follow any rules.

Now see what happens in one cycle. You will understand menstruation.

The beginning of the menstrual period is the beginning of a cycle. Menstrual blood is actually the outer two-thirds of the uterine lining which is shed (figure 1). Menstrual blood is red but there's only about 3-4 spoonfuls of blood in it, with the rest being substances from the uterine lining.

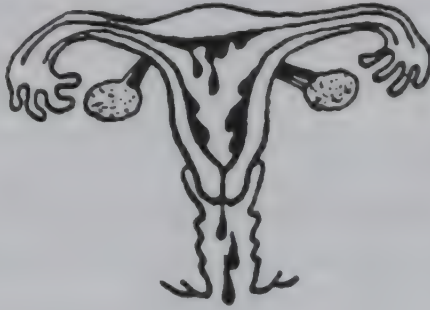
Several days after the start of the period, the brain sends a signal to the ovaries to wake up eggs. More than ten eggs, after many days of resting peacefully, suddenly wake up and start to develop. During that time, the uterine lining thickens to prepare to receive the egg (if the egg is fertilised). Out of the ten eggs, one will ripen and rise to the surface of the ovary (figure 2). The egg ripens and is released, that is, it leaves the ovary, and is promptly caught by the fimbria (figure 3). The egg enters the fallopian tubes. Right after ovulation, the uterine lining continues thickening in preparation to receive the egg (figure 4).

If you don't have sex, the egg won't meet sperm. It doesn't need the nest in the uterus. Therefore after a while it dissolves and sheds outside, which is the menses of the next cycle.

If you have sex, the egg may meet and combine with a sperm, come to reside in the uterus, and develop into a baby, and you stop menstruating.



FIGURE 1  
Menstruation



About 2/3rds of the uterine lining is shed.

FIGURE 2



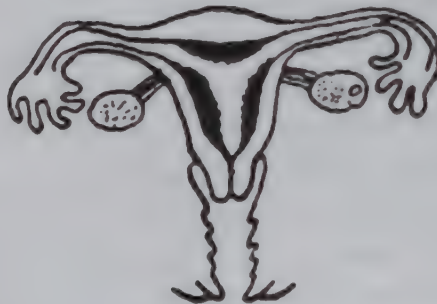
The nearly ripe egg rises to the surface of the ovary. The uterine lining thickens.

FIGURE 3



Ovulation; the fimbria takes the egg.

FIGURE 4



The uterine lining continues to thicken.

There are anti-pain techniques you can try. Several days before your period, you can prevent pain by eating mugwort, and avoiding tea, coffee, and alcoholic beverages. Some people avoid eggs and milk. You should be sure to eat well and sleep enough in the days when you have your period. Some girls like to run or ride a bicycle daily to prevent pain, and they also run or ride a bike while menstruating and find that it alleviates their pain. If you have pain, you can apply heat, soak your feet in hot water, put a cushion against your stomach, or massage your back. When the pain is light, keeping busy may cause you to forget the pain. One woman who has a lot of pain says she often lies down peacefully, puts up with the pain, and doesn't fight it, so that the pain goes away quickly. Some girls use traditional medications such as *Cao ich mau* and *Hoan dieu kinh* and find them effective. In addition, if you have a lot of pain, you can use painkillers like aspirin, ibuprofen, or alaxan.

Because there used to be little scientific information about menstruation, fears and misconceptions are still widespread. If you are still confused, read the appendix "Answers to some questions about menstruation" at the back of the book.

## **Vaginal secretions**

Girls at puberty also start to notice some sticky fluid in their underwear. This is "vaginal secretions", also known as "cervical secretions". These secretions are clear white, opaque white, or yellowish. Some girls have a lot, others little. Different bodies are different.

The function of these secretions is to keep the vagina moist and clean. In addition, in the cervix they also have the function of providing an easy path for sperm to enter the uterus when ovulation has occurred, and to prevent sperm from entering when there is no egg waiting. Therefore they change according to the cycle:

After your menses stop, you may feel dry in your opening and there may be no secretions. Or you may notice one of the following two types of secretions: dry and sticky, or wet and thin.

Towards the time of ovulation, these secretions are more abundant, thinner, and wetter. They are clear like egg whites, and may be pinkish. If you hold the secretion between two fingers, you can stretch it. Ovulation occurs around the time when you have this kind of secretion.

After ovulation, the secretions gradually lose their wetness and become dry and sticky. In some girls they disappear entirely. Some girls have dry secretions until the next menstrual cycle begins. Some others notice wet secretions and feel their opening damp when menses is about to occur.

That's the normal case. If you have an *infection in the reproductive tract*, your secretions will have some unusual qualities, such as being dark yellow or green, having a very bad smell, being more abundant than usual, or perhaps being accompanied by itching. If this is the case, you should go to the doctor immediately.

## Hygiene of the reproductive organs

Many girls still remember when they were small their grandmother often called their reproductive organs "little one". Everyday grandmother remonstrated, "Come now so grandma can wash your little one." Yes, hygiene of the reproductive organs is quite important. You should wash your "little one" and change your underwear daily. Remember only to wash on the outside, not the inside, as the vagina will clean itself. Wash your underwear immediately after wearing it and hang it out in the sun. After going to the bathroom, wipe from front to back to avoid bringing bacteria from the anus up and causing disease to your "little one".

## Hair

Your body starts to develop a lot of hair, most of which is pubic hair around the lower reproductive organs. At the beginning there are only a few hairs, then more appear, and possibly are curly. You get hair on your legs, and possibly also in your armpits. Some girls have little body hair, others a lot. Girls who have a lot of leg hair will sometimes hear their friends recommend that they shave it off. Think about it carefully, as after you shave the hair will grow back thicker and darker. Don't trouble yourself with the thought that abundant body hair means lack of femininity. That's totally wrong. Body hair and head hair are the same stuff, so why does long hair mean you're very feminine, but if you have a little body hair you lose your femininity? That's a mistake.



## A FEW THINGS BOYS AND GIRLS MAY BE INTERESTED IN

**Oh heavens, why am I so ugly?**

Puberty is a time of much confusion. Some people are miserable because they have pimples. Others waste an hour trying to paint their eyes to look bigger. Others wish their breasts would be bigger and their waists smaller. Who knows how many people complain, "Why am I so ugly?" Meanwhile adults look and reminisce about their former youthful beauty. So am I beautiful or ugly?

In fact beauty or ugliness are inside your head. Really. There are very few models and athletes compared with the whole population, so don't use them as your standard. Nature's law is diversity. Everyone of us is a unique individual with our own personality and different appearance. This is what makes life interesting!

Since when does beauty follow a formula or standard? Just look at everyone and you'll see. There are many people who, while fat, thin, tall, short, big or small, are beautiful. They are beautiful because of beautiful eyes or a charming smile. They are beautiful because of their kind personality, self-confidence, sincerity, or vitality...and for so many other reasons. Girls, don't be concerned about the sizes of breasts, waists and bottoms of beauty contest winners. Boys, take your eyes away from the big muscles on body builders. Why compare yourself to others? Just put aside half an hour to forget about your bad points and look for your good points, your beautiful features. How's that? There are probably more than a few points that you're proud of, aren't there? Don't insist on bemoaning and denouncing your weak points, it'll just make you ugly. If you have self-confidence, you'll become more attractive.

There are two "better than wonderful" ways to make yourself attractive. First, eat well, be active, and exercise or play sports. Health means physical attractiveness. Second, learn to be a warm and kind person and to love yourself, your friends, and those around you. That will make your soul beautiful, which is no easy achievement.

A couple words for those who often tease their friends: school age is the time of being mischievous, where teasing is your daily food. But not all jokes are fun. Some people tease their friends about their weak points, making their friends feel self-pity and unhappiness, and making them lose their self-confidence. Should you do that? Don't be so thoughtless as to become cruel. Whenever you feel like teasing someone, put yourself in that person's shoes and see how it would feel. Being kind will make others love you, whereas if you are often mean others will distance themselves from you, which you probably don't want at all.

### **Acne, flashlights, automobile lights, or... revolting seeds of love!!!**

Pimples earn all sorts of names that are not loveable at all. It's too bad that they're rather common in young people. That's because oil-producing glands under the skin are more active during puberty, secreting oil to the outside of the skin. If a tiny drop of oil does not get out to the face, it gradually accumulates into a small white or yellow "lump", which is a pimple. Pimples are just a "side effect" of this age of development. Don't get so caught up worrying about them that you lose your appetite and lose sleep. Forget about them, and after age 20 they will gradually reduce or completely disappear.



If you want to deal with your pimples, see what factors cause your pimples to appear. Some people get a lot of pimples when they stay up late, when they're worried, when exam time approaches. Some others get pimples right before menstruation, or because of drinking coffee, tea, or smoking. If you notice a factor that stimulates the growth of your pimples, avoid it. Eating lots of fruits, vegetables and fibre helps



digestion and may help with acne. You can also wash your face and rub it gently to help the blood circulate (though actually this has little effect). But don't wash too much, as excessive washing dries your skin, so the glands will secrete more oil, which may make your acne even heavier.

Most pimples are small and go away on their own. Only a few are big and last a long time. It's best if you don't squeeze your pimples, because squeezing can cause the pimples to spread. In cases where "I can't resist", only squeeze pimples that are "ripe" and easy to squeeze. Before squeezing it, wash your hands well to avoid infection. When you squeeze, be careful to avoid damaging the surrounding area, so as not to give yourself a scar. Be cautious with pimples around your mouth. Cup your hand on your mouth horizontally, this is the "forbidden area", as pimples in this area if squeezed early or with dirty hands may become seriously infected, developing into boils, which will be much more painful and ugly.

Acne is usually not a big problem, but if you are unlucky and frequently have a lot of big closed pimples or ones with pus, or ones that leave ugly scars, you can go to a dermatologist for an exam and treatment.

## **Smelly armpits**

Smelly armpits cause more than a few people to worry. Some think they have a terrible disease. Others lose self-confidence and don't dare come close to their friends, giving themselves a reputation of being antisocial.

It's actually not a disease at all, and there are ways to deal with it. Puberty causes your sweat glands to become more active and your armpits to become damper. Armpit smell is due to bacteria in the sweat there. Everyone has their own smell. Some consider it a sign of the individual, a personal attraction. But others find the smell unpleasant. You can reduce the smell by wearing loose cotton clothes which absorb moisture and allow sweat to evaporate easily, and the important thing is to wash and change your shirt regularly so that the bad smell doesn't have enough time to appear. Some people rub lemon or alum under the arms after bathing to reduce the smell. You can try that too. If you live in a big city, you may buy deodorant.



## **“Playing” with yourself**

Sometimes you find children who naturally use their hand to play with their genitals. But then an adult says, "Don't do that", causing children gradually to forget their game. Then puberty comes, sexual development is strong, and many youth rediscover this game. One friend told us:

*When I was about 10 or 12, during the winter I often put my hand under the blanket down there to play. I didn't think anything about it. But when I was 19 or 20 I read about masturbation and realised that what I was doing was masturbating. I panicked.* (Huyen, 20 years old)

The word “masturbation” has long been associated with all kinds of evil things like infertility and madness, with the goal of preventing it in children. For that reason youth cannot help worrying about it.

*Is masturbation harmful or not? If it's not then people should say so, so that teenagers will know. I often do it but I feel afraid.* (Hai, 18 years old)

Social science research finds that playing with oneself is commonly found in youth. According to modern science, it's a natural occurrence. In this age group that hasn't yet had sex, youth are exploring their bodies. Of course not all people are alike. Some people never stimulate themselves, others do it a lot, still others a little. It depends on the thoughts and feelings of each person. Self-stimulation does not cause any diseases at all.

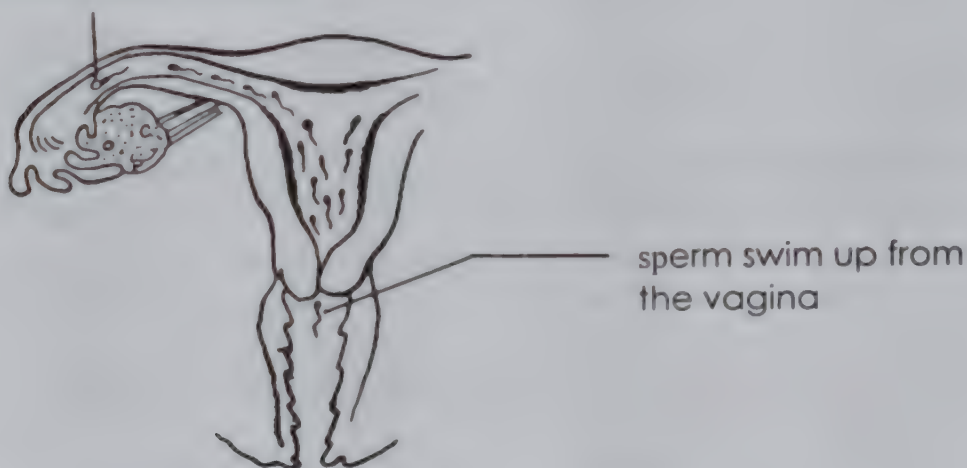
Many parents of teenagers worry that if their children masturbate they will think about sexual relations. We sympathise with that concern. But actually we can say that self-stimulation helps many youth to resolve physiological pressures, to avoid entering into sexual relations at an early age, to prevent the consequences of unwanted pregnancy, and to prevent sexually transmitted diseases including HIV.

## **Why do people have babies?**

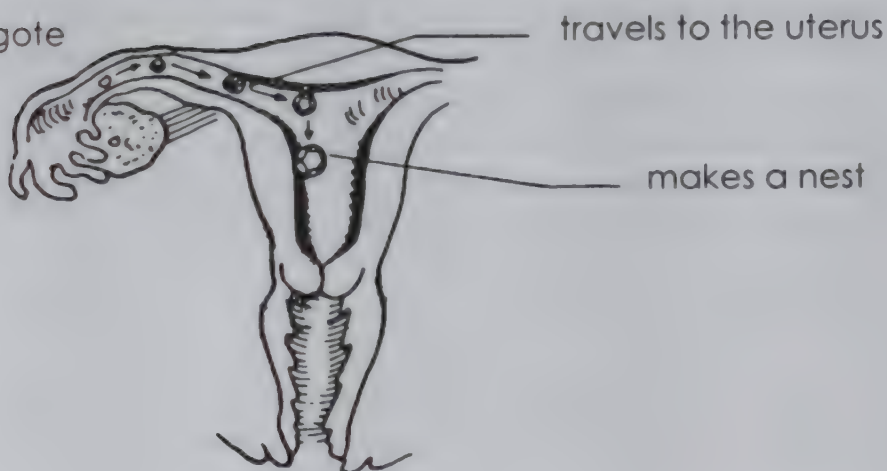
All small children have asked their mother, “Why is your stomach so big?”, “How did you give birth to me?” By this age nearly all of us have some basic information. But we still want to know more, right?

Of course the egg and sperm have to combine with each other. This requires sexual relations between a man and a woman. When two people have sexual intercourse, the man ejaculates his sperm into the woman's vagina. Or before ejaculation, the man releases a small amount of fluid that may contain a little amount of sperm. Inside the vagina, the sperm swim up, first past the cervix, then through the uterus up to the fallopian tubes. Their rendezvous point is the outer third of the fallopian tube. The sperm wait there, and if they're lucky they meet an egg. The egg combines with the healthiest sperm, creating a cell called the "zygote". The egg then secretes a secure shell, so that no other sperm can enter it. After that the zygote does not remain in the small fallopian tube, but instead seeks a nest in the uterus, which has a thick lining which supplies the needed nutrients. It makes its nest there and develops into a baby.

egg and sperm combine



zygote

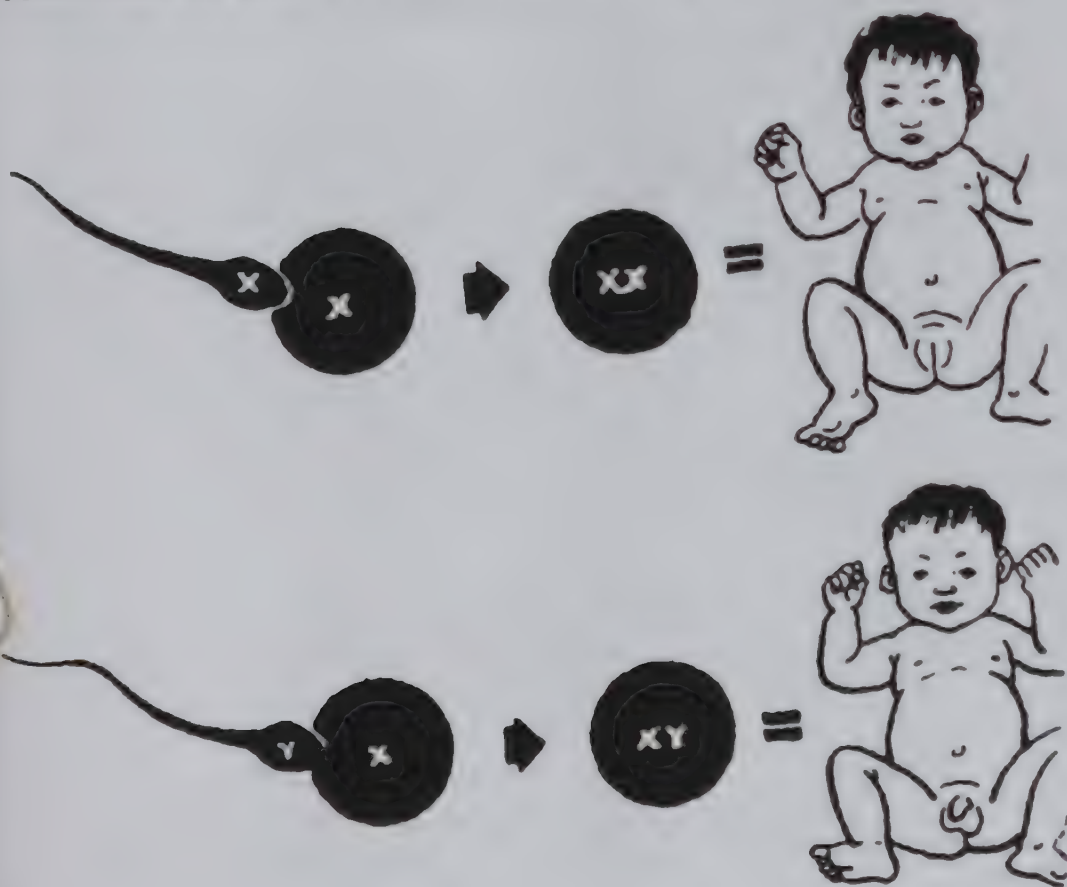


About nine months later the baby is born. The natural birth canal begins at the uterus, leads to the vagina, through the vaginal opening, and out. Girls reading this probably have their eyes open wide in surprise, because our vaginal opening is so small. True, but as you give birth when you are older, it will stretch quite large for the baby to pass through.

All of us were born this way. Fantastic!

## Why am I a boy and you a girl?

Not only young people ask this question. Since antiquity people have often had questions about sex selection. Science has found that the essence of sex lies in the tiny set of chromosomes. Each cell of your body contains 23 pairs of chromosomes, which determine your basic characteristics. One of those 23 pairs determines your sex. There are two kinds of sex chromosomes, one that appears like the letter X, one that appears like the letter Y. Women have an XX pair, men XY.





Egg and sperm are only half of a normal cell. They don't have 23 pairs, but rather only 23 single chromosomes. Thus only when they combine do they have the full 23 pairs. The egg always carries an X (because females have an XX pair). Sperm carries either an X or a Y (because males have an XY pair).

Thus it's easy to understand that if the egg meets a sperm containing an X, the zygote will have an XX pair, and will develop into a girl. If the egg meets a sperm containing a Y, the zygote will have an XY pair, and will develop into a boy.

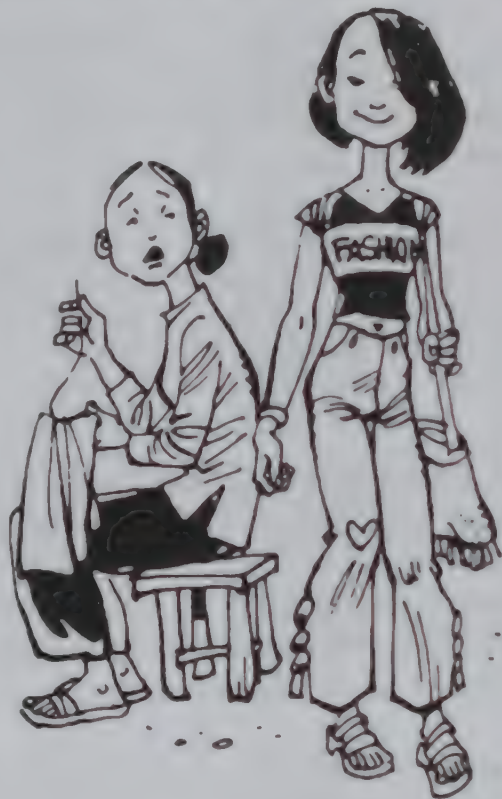
Whether you are a boy or a girl is "heaven's decision", because neither your father nor mother can decide what sort of sperm the egg will meet.

## NEW FEATURES IN YOUR RELATIONS WITH YOUR PARENTS

### Separating yourself from your parents' protection

One widespread characteristic of people during puberty is wanting to be an adult and thinking of yourself as an adult. You no longer cry or snivel, you no longer ask to go out with your parents. You want to choose your own friends, to stay up late, to wear what you want. Your relationship with your parents certainly changes. At times you feel despondent and dissatisfied because it seems your parents haven't yet noticed that you're a "grown-up", and still consider you a small child.

*Every time my father asks me something I just say "uh" or "huh", because it's always about plans for studying, what subject do I like, which school is good, which school isn't. What a headache. Whenever my parents show interest in me, make me wear this, not wear that, I get annoyed, I want to say to my parents: "I don't need your interest. Why do you have to tell me such simple things. I know what I have to do!"*



*(Tam, 13 years old)*

There are times when you feel that your parents can't understand your thoughts, wishes, feelings. You don't confide in your parents as frequently as you did when you were younger:

*When I was small, I told my mother whatever happened in school. Then when I was about 12, my classmates talked about older students who loved each other. I went home and told my mother. She didn't say anything but she became very serious, so I no longer dared to tell her anything, or if I did tell her, I saw what's*

*OK to tell her. Later I hid from her everything about my own love life. Actually it's embarrassing to mention it, because we've never talked about it.*

(Thu, 21 years old)

## **Sometimes arguing with your parents or disobeying them**

You are discovering many interesting things in the world around you: music, novels, poems, movies, football, friends... At this time, many parents become very worried, afraid that their children will be careless about their studies. Wishing not to worry their parents, but not being able to give up their happiness, some people develop a "split" life: studying conscientiously at home, but reserving a couple times a week for things they enjoy.

*My parents forbade me to learn guitar because they were afraid it would affect the time I spend on school work. I've been learning for a year without letting my parents know, so I always have to go to my friend's houses to practice. But what's wrong with learning guitar?*

(Bich, 16 years old)

It's hardly surprising that during this time of their life, youth sometimes "rebel" and don't do what their parents tell them:

*I know I have to sweep the house without anyone telling me. But I'll be about to sweep when my parents say, "Go sweep the house." That's it, I throw the broom aside and go out immediately.*

(Lien, 17 years old)

Thus for many of us, puberty can cause some gale force winds in the family. When we look back, many of us will have a better understanding of our parents, and some of us will have some regrets about our former behaviour:

*At that time it was easy to get angry with my parents about everything. I was not understanding and also horribly stubborn. My parents were also miserable. Now I feel I have to thank them for putting up with me when I was like that.*

(Thu, 20 years old)

However, both teens and parents want to do something now to reduce those gale force winds. What's to do?



## Children and parents should try to understand each other

Teenagers are growing up, with their own thoughts and with the desire to do things for themselves. Meanwhile, parents often think, "However big they are, they're still children." This causes various disagreements at times. Both sides are anxious, because nobody wants to get angry with those whom they love the most. So both parents and children need to look together for a common language.

Puberty has the advantage of being a time of self-confidence, of believing in your ability to think and decide for yourself, but you also can't deny that you're a greenhorn to life. If you look back at the previous year, you will see that you did some things that now seem laughable, even ridiculous. That means you are growing and becoming wiser. But the time of growing is actually when you most need your parents' guidance. Life isn't as simple as it is in the family. It's actually rather complicated, with many bad things that perhaps you don't yet understand: deceit, gambling, alcohol, open and hidden drug use, and irresponsible living, etc. In order to avoid difficulties and mistakes, you should put your pride aside and calmly present to your parents all that you are doing and plan to do. Your parents' advice helps you enter life on stable ground, find the straight road, develop into a good, loveable and respectable person. Keep in mind that your parents' concern many times isn't excessive, and don't be too annoyed if your parents sometimes seem extreme.

As for parents, try to remember when you were in this difficult time, so as to sympathise and empathise with youth. You shouldn't scold your children too much, as it will make your children reluctant to share with you, reluctant to listen to you, and perhaps even make them lose their self-confidence. If you want to provide good guidance and support in this developmental step, try to become a trustworthy friend to your children. All teens like to have respect and trust. Mrs. Ha told us:

*I have to make big efforts to keep an eye on my growing daughter. There are times when we disagree about things, but we have to discuss them in order to understand what she's thinking. Sometimes I'm angry because she often argues with me, then I think of my young days when I used to be like that too.*

## NEW FEATURES IN FRIENDSHIPS

At this stage of growing up, the need for associating with friends develops strongly, and your relations expand considerably. You are gradually becoming familiar with social life, and practising communication with people. Friends become an important part of life.

### Friendship widens and becomes deeper

Young people have a particularly popular form of socialising, which is through groups. There are many different types of groups, such as neighbours, or those with similar ambitions such as a group for studies, a football team, or a music group. Minh told us about the group which she's been in for three years:

*My group has seven members, boys and girls, who have been going out together since 7th grade. Generally it's really fun, because they're easygoing and kind people. We often go to West Lake. Some of them are very caring, I often confide in them. We also take long trips from time to time.*



Groups of friends play an important role in the steps of maturation for every young person, when life has so many new things. Groups act as moral support systems, for sharing happy and sad feelings, for helping each other to be more confident. It is the first step towards living within a community, learning good qualities from your friends, and learning how to interact and how to care for people. However, there are a couple of things you should be careful about when participating in groups.

Some groups of friends are peaceful, others lively. Some like to show their strength through identical clothes and hairstyles. Whatever the style, members of the group often feel proud, and consider the group as their second family. Groups are important to youth. However, sometime



the "group spirit" becomes extreme, becoming divisive; group members may look down on people outside the group in an irrational way, creating bad feelings between groups, which sometimes even lead to fights. There's nothing nice about that, and it fills many teens with regret:

*In junior secondary school, we were in separate groups. I don't understand how but we argued, then pounced and fought each other. Several kids bled. I still have a scar on my cheek, but it's not very obvious. Hang in the other clique has a big scar on her temple. When we got to high school I became close, so close to Hang. We were so foolish before.* (Hong, 19 years old)

Some friends confide that there are times when they're annoyed because they feel they have to try to be the same as their friends in the group, which can be really difficult, as it was for Giang:

*I really hate having my picture taken, but the guys I'm friends with like to do it. I have to go to the park with them, then have to stand this way or that way, it bores me to death. To do it every once in a while is all right, but all the time.*

The members of every group have their own personal characteristics and way of thinking. Friendship can only really be deep and positive for your maturation if people understand that. You should mix with your friends, but everyone can live according to their own personal ways.

Everyone who has been in a group of friends knows about some of the hilarious fun that happens, so much fun that you don't want to leave your friends when it's time to go home. But groups of friends are not only for going out. Many groups are responsible, take care of each other, and discuss schoolwork. Any of you whose group often goes out should be careful. Don't let what happened to Linh develop in your group:

*In junior secondary school my class was really fun, the whole class went out all the time. But when we got to the entrance exam for high school it was horribly messed up, as out of 54 people only 11 passed. It wasn't that we were not smart, but that we didn't pay attention to our studies so we lost the basics. Those who didn't pass had to study in continuation schools or stay at home.*

Apart from groups, there are other forms of friendship. It's no surprise that many people don't join any group, and have only a couple of close friends. People's personalities are by nature diverse, and so are social relations. Some of you may be quiet and not enjoy noise and



boisterousness, and only need close friends. Some of you may still be looking but haven't yet found a suitable group. Don't think that someone who doesn't go out in a group doesn't fit in or doesn't appreciate friends. You shouldn't count the number of friends. The most important things are mutual understanding, sympathy, and support.

## Shy and...self-confident

Shyness doesn't mean cowardice, but rather being awkward or clumsy when dealing with other people. Some lucky people are more self-confident than others. When shy people see them they can't help feeling self-pity. Actually it's rare that anyone doesn't have a bit of shyness in them; the problem is how to overcome that shyness. Don't despair: shyness can turn into self-confidence if you try your best and your friends support you. The following is a story of the "shyest person in the world" who became eloquent.

*In kindergarten I would sit apart watching everyone play making wooden houses. I wanted to join them, but when I thought of saying "let me play with you" I trembled. In 1st grade when we cleaned the schoolyard I would stand and cry because I had never held a broom before, so I didn't dare sweep. I was horribly timid. Only at the end of primary school did I know the names of everyone in the class. Only when I got to junior high school and my friends artily encouraged me did I first start jumping rope and playing ball. I was unbearably happy. But I still couldn't talk to others, especially adults, it was awful, just awful. So I decided I had to practice. I practised having little conversations with people, and gradually I discovered that people were just ordinary, not terrible like I thought. But if there was a third person my voice would drop, I was afraid of them hearing me. Then a friend said that everyone has the right to their own opinion, it's not necessary that others agree. I felt that it was right, so gradually I began saying what I thought. Oh, I had so many miserable days, so many tormented nights, but in the end I reached where I am today. Hee hee.*

(Quynh, 23 years old)

There are probably few people as shy as Quynh, but many people feel they are not confident and bold, feel they can't sing or play an instrument as well as their friends, and thus think they can't show up in a crowd. Do you know the famous phrase: "Nobody is dull in the world, everyone carries a piece of history"? Believe in your own special value. Maybe you just haven't noticed what's valuable in you.

## AWARENESS OF SEXUALITY

When you reach this age your awareness of sexuality becomes greater than before. You're no longer a little boy or a little girl, but a youth. Perhaps you pay more attention to the way you dress, and how to do your hair to be handsome or pretty. In your conversations, you like to talk about the opposite sex, and the terms "those boys" and "those girls" often appear.

### Turbulent feelings of teens

Awareness of sexuality sneaks into friendships. Jokingly pairing friends into couples is a rather popular joke. Often the people who are pushed are embarrassed:

*In my class there's a boy and a girl who are really close, and they're really nice. But everyone teases them, so now they don't dare to be friends anymore.*

(Phuong, 16 years old)

Some people at this age start to pay attention to those of the opposite sex. In the crowd of friends, perhaps one person becomes the "target", who you often think about and to whom you like to be close.

*The first time I noticed a girl was in 6th grade. She was an average student, she was pretty, but I felt she was really charming, it's really hard to explain but I really felt she was more charming than all the other girls.*  
(Khoa, 20 years old)





*In junior high school I suddenly got to like Toan in my class. Whenever there was a singing party, we would take turns singing. I would choose a song, sing it passionately while looking at him, sing it just for him. (Lam, 20 years old)*

Those are your first early stirrings, which may make you want to improve yourself to be more beautiful in "that person's" eyes. The attraction can be rather strong, making you emotional or confused, but you should remember that feelings at this time are generally impulsive, and they will go away as naturally as they came.

*I have a friend named Trung who I liked since 6th grade. Whenever I saw him I would smile, and I often gave him a passionate look. I liked him for so long, but when I got to 8th grade I realised I had stopped liking him long before. Later I liked a guy near my house, but he considered me a child. When I got to high school I liked one person every year, to the point where I thought about him all the time, but each of them only had that good fortune for one year, or a few months. (Trang, 22 years old)*

Parents often tell you not to love early, because parents were once young, they had excited, dreamy times, but they passed through them, so they know that those feelings are just temporary, and are worried that you will neglect your studies (and it's true that if you're in love you easily forget to study!).

Psychologists consider that agitation in teenagers is the first developmental step in feelings for the opposite sex, but they're not the time for entering into love relationships, because physiology and psychology of this age aren't yet mature enough to bear the complicated feelings that cause enough headaches to adults.

Feelings in adolescence are important. Value them, but wait for the deeper feelings which follow later.

## **Awareness of your body and of sex**

Our awareness of sexuality widens in each social relationship, but we don't forget ourselves. Noticing your daily sexual development, you must at times feel proud and happy. Sometimes you like to boast a bit:



*We girls are really funny. Sometimes in high school someone would make an unhappy face and say to another, "It's a technical difficulty" [meaning menses]. She would look unhappy but seemed really proud. If anyone asked me "Do you have it yet?" I would reply, "I got it a long time ago."*

(Lan Anh, 20 years old)

In a natural way, we begin to want to understand about our own bodies and those of the opposite sex. Perhaps the word "sex" or some stories about love slip into your ears, making you a bit curious. Some parents feel that it's necessary to explain about sexuality and the body to youth, but most are embarrassed when they talk about this subject with their children, or don't want their children to know much about sexuality and sex. Therefore youth look for information from many sources such as friends, books, and movies:

*At that time there were many books that had small details about making love, and I would often steal them from my mother to read those sections over and over.*

(Lam, 26 years old)

One regrettable thing is that what you hear from your friends is often not correct. Meanwhile, there are many kinds of movies and books in circulation that give us wrong ideas about these issues. Teenagers who encounter these are truly unlucky, because they merely provide sexual stimulation without helping you to have correct insight.

*Watching those films I find nothing divine like I had thought. I used to think it must be really nice.*

(Tam, 17 years old)

If you want to know more, read the books mentioned in the appendix "Good books for teenagers" at the end of the book, or write letters to the doctors who give advice in youth magazines.

## SOME THINGS WE YOUTH SHOULD THINK ABOUT

### To smoke or not to smoke?

This is a source of confusion for many young men age 16, 17, or 18. Everyone knows that smoking is harmful, even horribly so. (If you don't yet know then see the section "The harms of tobacco" in the back of the book.) But many people still smoke. At home your father and older brothers smoke. Out of the house, your friends smoke. Young people experiment with smoking, becoming addicted without realising it, then suddenly one day want to quit but discover it's quite difficult.

"If you don't smoke you're not a man"—that thought has harmed who knows how many young men. But think about it, it's truly ridiculous, no? Whether or not you're a man depends on your way of life and way of behaving. "Being a man" is the quality of human beings: how can a cigarette turn someone into a man? Knowledge about tobacco was limited before, so our fathers and brothers made the mistake of smoking. We young people should wisely avoid this track, no? We all know "The house prospers when the child is better than the father."

The hard part for youth is peer pressure. Friends are very important. We're happy when our friends encourage us. When our friends tease us, we lose our appetite and sleep. Our friends say, "You're a guy, have a cigarette for fun." So we take a cigarette "for fun" and grimace, with our stomach in knots: "What's worse than this?" It's true, puberty brings some truly difficult times. But friends, as you get older you'll find even more difficult things that you'll have to overcome. Don't rush to surrender. Be firm in your decision not to smoke. You should also advise the friends who offer you cigarettes to stop poisoning themselves. Only then will you really live for your friends.

And don't be too worried about looking funny in your friends' eyes. Your friends may give you a hard time, but sooner or later they'll understand and respect your wishes. After all, friendship means caring for and respecting each other.

It's the rare girl who likes a guy to smoke. Listen to this:

*I like a real man. Guys who don't smoke must get invited to smoke who knows how many times a day, but they still don't smoke. Now that's what I call a real man.*  
(Ha, 16 years old)

Smoking is just one issue. Your friends might pressure you to do other things. Did you know, many youth live in an uncultured way, even using drugs or experimenting with sex or crime just to follow their friends. "If you're near ink you'll turn black, if you're near a light you'll be bright." Look for good people to spend your time with. When you see your friends doing bad things, advise them to stop. Puberty is also the age of learning to live with responsibility to yourself. Think about what you're doing.

### **One phenomenon deserving reproach**

In discussions with girls and in reading magazines for teenagers, we often encounter anger towards boys who harass girls with bad words and behaviour. They gather and block the alley, harass girls on the way to school or even in the classroom, which causes girls constant fear. Many girls are frightened to the point where they don't dare go to school or barely dare to go home after school, and must get their parents to come pick them up at a friend's. Boys are also upset as these bad people make up only a small component of males, but cause so much shame on them all.

If you're one of those "monsters", please know that you are thoughtless and extremely blameworthy. Lacking in respect for girls, and loudly supported by some badly behaved friends or older guys, you have committed very foolish acts. Maybe you enjoy behaving this way just for the power it gives you over the fearful girls, but do you know the degree to which they scorn you? If you're not concerned about what girls think, just ask yourself when you do that how much of the "human" is left in you?

Re-examine yourself. You've absorbed much of the poison of old ways of praising boys and scorning girls. Cure yourself. It's not difficult, you just need to think a little. Every guy has a mother who he loves and



respects endlessly. Many guys also have an older or younger sister, and regardless of whatever quarrels you may have, you still really love them. So whenever you hassle a girl, it's quite possible that your sister is also being hassled by someone, or maybe even your mother has to put up with that abuse. That makes you really angry, right? So respect other females as if they were your mother or sister. If you want to have manhood, you've got to have humanity. If you're humane, girls and women will love and admire you.

As for those who never feel regret about their bad behaviour, when they grow up they'll never know how to live with people of the opposite sex. Not only will people not like them, but they will lose a lot of happiness in their marital life.

### **How to relate to "the special opposite sex friend"?**

In puberty, we often begin to think a lot about and have feelings for each other. How should we care for each other? What do you think of the following story?

*Son and Lam were in the same high school. Lam, 17, was in 11A class. Son, 18, was in 12H class. They belonged to the same big group of friends. They often met, played sports, sang, and went out. The two friends had special feelings for each other and enjoyed being near each other. Whenever the group took trips, Son borrowed his father's motorcycle to take Lam. Aside from going out with the whole group, the two friends sometimes went out just as a couple. They enjoyed holding hands as they went around the lake. Once they sat by the lake, talked, and exchanged their first kisses.*

*Their friends discussed Son and Lam. Lam's close female friend admired Son for being handsome and fun. Son's two closest male friends teased him: "Have you done it yet? Does your new love 'have anything' yet? Tell us about it!" Those jokes had an effect on Son's thinking, causing him to think more about "that".*

*One day they went to the park and made out. They became very close, and they both felt excited. Lam was a bit sacred but Son told her, "We love each other. What's the difference?". Son wanted to go farther, while Lam resisted: "Don't do that. Don't." But Son was very sweet, kissed Lam passionately, and tried to persuade her with words and actions. So they had sex. After that, they both felt embarrassed. Lam was worried but whenever they met, Son said: "We have*

*already done it so let's continue, it doesn't matter." Neither of them talked about the results that could happen or did anything to prevent them.*

*After two months, Lam noticed that she hadn't gotten her period. She was worried, and hoped that her period was just irregular. She didn't dare talk to anyone, not even Son. Fortunately Lam's mother noticed that her daughter was different, took her for a check-up, and discovered she was pregnant. Lam had to get an abortion. She was very unhappy afterwards. Lam's mother was angry with her and her boyfriend. Son was terrified. They fought and met each other less often. Finally they stopped dating.*

Why does the story have such an unhappy ending? You probably have a lot of ideas about what Lam and Son should or shouldn't have done. We believe your ideas are probably no different from what you will read here:

- We first must say that Son and Lam are young and shouldn't have had sex. One reason is that their bodies aren't fully developed, so being pregnant or having a baby would have a big effect on the girl's health. That's not to mention that sex when the body is still developing increases the risk of reproductive cancer. Neither sex should have sexual intercourse before age 20.
- Another reason is that neither of them were sufficiently emotionally mature. Love relations are complicated. Sociologists and psychologists advise boys and girls at this age not yet to enter into them. In love relations of people who are truly mature, both people feel for, respect, and have responsibility for each other. Nobody forces anyone to have sexual relations, and if they have sex, they will openly exchange with each other and will prevent undesirable results. The relations between Son and Lam weren't yet that mature. It couldn't be called true love.
- Neither Son nor Lam had knowledge about sexuality or sex, but just took the risk and thus pregnancy occurred. Unsafe sex can cause pregnancy, transmission of diseases and can affect the future ability to have children for both sexes. Read the section "Knowledge teens should have" in the next section. Even if you think that you won't have sex for a long time, you will find the knowledge that you need to prepare for life.

- They were young and lacking in experience, so they should have talked to older people. When the problem happened, Lam and Son should have talked to each other, supported each other, and talked to their parents. Of course their parents would be in pain and feel angry, but parents are the people who love them most and who can look after them. If her mother hadn't found out, Lam would have given birth and her life would have been much more difficult. Or if they had wanted to end the pregnancy but had foolishly gone to an illegal centre, it would have been very dangerous.

- One more thing: although Son and Lam may not have realised it, there was sexual abuse in their relations. That's because Son used emotions to push Lam to have sex even though she didn't want to and was afraid. Girls have the right to be respected in love. Boys should remember that, and not do something bad with their girlfriend just for their "male honour".



# KNOWLEDGE TEENS SHOULD HAVE

## The harms of tobacco

Tobacco is dangerous, but in what way? If we compiled all the research that's been done, we could write many books on the subject. We'll only say a little here. But first we'd like to warn you: breathe deeply to calm yourself, or you'll faint.

There are many ways tobacco can harm you: from smoking cigarettes, from chewing betel nut with tobacco leaf, and from breathing the smoke of others. Tobacco causes three of ten deaths from heart disease, and nine of ten deaths from lung cancer. Tobacco causes many other cancers including cancers of the mouth, anus, larynx, oesophagus, liver, kidney, pancreas, breast, cervix, and penis. If you start smoking before age 18, your lungs will stop developing and shrink, leading to problems breathing and the risk of future disease. Smokers are at a higher risk than non-smokers of ulcers in the digestive system and of chronic intestinal problems, and when they get these sicknesses, it is more difficult to treat them and their risk of recurrence is higher. Smoking raises the risk of osteoporosis. Smoking causes sleeping disorders including insomnia and bad sleep. Smoking doubles the risk of cataracts in the elderly. Smoking reduces the ability of blood to move through the body, increases the heart rate, and reduces your strength. Children and adults who don't smoke but who live in the smoke of others are at a higher risk of acute and chronic ear and throat infections, and their intelligence and physical strength are affected. Pregnant mothers who smoke have a higher risk of miscarriage, delivering a low birthweight baby, or having their baby become sick or die. Babies of fathers who smoke during the months before and during pregnancy are at a two-fold risk of leukemia and harelip, and a 40% higher risk of brain cancer when compared to children whose fathers have never smoked. And of course smoking makes you ugly, because your fingers and teeth turn yellow, your breath stinks, and you wrinkle prematurely.

Smokers lose 8-23 years of their life. Estimates indicate that about seven million Vietnamese alive at present (10% of the population) will die early from tobacco-related diseases, with one half dying between age 35-

69. If we Vietnamese people continue smoking at current rates, then those currently under age 15, 5.5 million will die early from tobacco.

Why is tobacco so dangerous? Cigarette smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, of which 43 are known carcinogens. Look at some of the chemicals in tobacco smoke: acetone (nail polish remover), ammonium (used in permanents), cadmium (from car batteries), DDT (a pesticide), carbon monoxide (car exhaust), formaldehyde (used for preserving dead bodies), naphthalene (poison for cockroaches), tar (for paving roads), phenol (disinfectant), arsenic (poison), butane (lighter fluid), and methanol (rocket fuel). There is also the addictive substance nicotine, which makes many people unable to give up poisonous cigarettes.

Since there are a lot of Western cigarettes on the market, many people believe that Westerners smoke a lot. That's actually not true. In the US, presently 28.1% of men and 23.5% of women smoke, and those figures are declining. In Canada smoking declined significantly from 1982 to 1991, with the sale of cigarettes declining 36%. Being boycotted in the West, tobacco companies turn to target developing countries like ours, and many people fall into their traps. What do you think of that contradiction?

Youth today are intelligent and educated. What's the point of tobacco when you're concerned about your health, your future, and the happiness of yourself and those close to you? Also, don't harm others by offering them cigarettes.

## **Avoid sexual abuse**

Both male and female youth may have times of being harassed or sexually abused. Any time someone touches you with bad intentions and makes you feel unpleasant or afraid, that is sexual abuse. It's too bad that this is not rare. The abuser is usually an adult or an older teen, either a stranger, someone you know, or someone you love. If this happens to you then no matter who they are, be determined to force them to stop that behaviour immediately. If it happens again, you must tell your parents. It's so terrible that in a few cases, adults use their physical strength to force children. If this terrible thing happens, it's not your fault. Tell your parents immediately. They will understand and empathise with you, and



will help you to stop the abuse or to deal with any undesired consequences. It is important for your spirits, health, and even your life to tell your parents early.

## **Safer sex**

The first words of advice for young teens is not to rush into romantic relationships, and certainly don't have sex. But we can't deny that some people are in a hurry, with the very sad results being abortions or unwanted births. There are others who contract diseases but hide them, and since they don't get cured they have many bad results later.

When still in school age, we should build a good personality and be ceaselessly learning. You should add to your repertoire information about safer sex, that is, contraception and disease prevention. This is the needed information for your whole life. Learning this will not cause you to lose your innocence. It's simply the learning needed to get rid of ignorance, which is always the father of undeserved falls and losses. Knowledge is good preparation for the future.

## **Contraceptive methods**

Perhaps you've already heard about many contraceptive methods. It's true that there are many, but you need to know a bit more deeply, because the effects of different methods are not the same. For example the methods of ejaculating outside the vagina (called "withdrawal") or the calendar method are not safe and their effectiveness is quite low, especially with teenagers, in whom disaster is likely. The IUD is only for women with children. Vasectomy and tubectomy are permanent. The methods you need to know are condoms, the contraceptive Pill, spermicides, and the emergency contraceptive Pill.

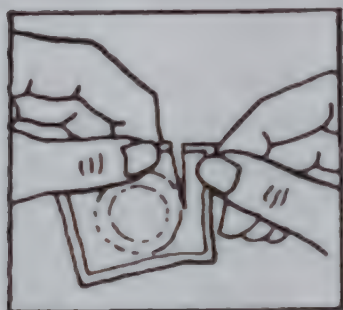
## **Condoms**

Condoms are small bags made of thin, soft, and sensitive material. When having sex, the man wears the condom, which helps the man and women not to come into contact with each other's sexual fluids, and which has a high effectiveness at preventing pregnancy (about 97%). Condoms are



sold in many drugstores and general stores. When buying the condom you need to make sure that the condom has not expired and hasn't had too much sun exposure. When using the condom, make sure it's in good shape. A good condom means it's new, the expiration date hasn't been reached, the packet is intact, and the condom is neither brittle nor discoloured. Use as follows:

The start: Don't unroll the condom before putting it on. The man puts the condom on while his penis is erect, before the penis comes into contact with the woman's reproductive organs. The way to use it is:



Push the condom to one side, tear the package and take it out gently, avoiding tearing it.



Hold the tip of the condom to let air out. Put the condom on the erect penis with the rim turning out.



Roll it down so the condom covers all of the penis to the end.

Afterwards: After sex is finished, the man takes the penis out of the woman's vagina while the penis is still erect and takes off the condom:



Pull the penis out while it's still hard, one hand on the rim of the condom.



Take the condom off. Throw the condom away, not allowing the semen to leak.



Afterwards don't allow the penis to come near the partner's sex organ.

## The contraceptive pill

This is a pill containing hormones used for women, whose main effect is to adjust the body's hormonal level, inhibiting ovulation. The Pill also has an effect on the cervical mucous and the uterine lining, inhibiting insemination and implantation. Most people use the kind of Pill that combines the two hormones estrogen and progesterone, which on the market are sold under the brand names Choice, Rigevidon, Marvelon, Microgynon, etc. Their effectiveness is very high (about 99%). Exluton is mainly used by breastfeeding women.

### *Instructions for use*

You can start taking it on any day in the cycle. Usually people wait until their period, so as to know they're not pregnant, to start taking the Pill. When you start taking it the Pill does not take effect immediately, but only begins to work one week later.

You take one pill a day, every day, at a fixed time every day. It's good to take the Pill at the same time you do something that you do every day, for example after brushing your teeth in the morning, when you eat dinner, and so on, so as to make it easy to remember to take it.

There are two types of Pill packets. One kind only has 21 pills. You follow the arrow on the packet, and when the packet is finished you rest for seven days, then start the next packet. More common is the type with 28 pills. You also follow the arrow on the packet, but when the packet is done you start taking the next packet the next day, without a break.

If you forget a Pill, then do as follows:

- If you forget one pill: When you remember take that pill immediately, and take the next pill at the usual time. You should use condoms or avoid sex for 48 hours.
- If you forget two pills: Immediately take two pills when you remember, and take the next pill at the usual time. You should use condoms until you finish that packet of pills.
- If you forget three pills: Throw away the old packet, and start a new packet immediately. It's just like you are only starting to use the Pill, which means for the first 7 days it has not yet taken effect, so you should use condoms or avoid sex.

## Spermicides

This is a method that has only recently appeared on the market in Vietnam. It is a type of chemical that has the effect of killing sperm. Spermicides come in many forms: foam, cream, and insertable tablet. To use: about 15 minutes before sex, the woman puts the drug in her vagina, deep inside by the cervix. The drug spreads out all over the cervical area and in the vagina. During sex, sperm meet the drug, and stop their movements.

If you always use it and use it according to the instructions, the effectiveness is 94%. However, the user effectiveness is lower, because if you don't put it in deep enough, or if you put it in the vagina less than 15 minutes before sex, the drug won't spread all over the cervical area.

## The emergency contraceptive pill

This is a drug used after sex when you didn't contracept. The composition is also female hormones, as with the daily contraceptive Pill, but the dose is much higher. It can prevent pregnancy in women. However, as the effectiveness is only 75%, it is only for emergencies, not regular use.

### *Instructions for use*

- Postinor brand pill: The manufacturer of Postinor instructs you to take one tablet within one hour after intercourse. However, many women cannot buy it within one hour. Don't worry, you may use it in a different way which is just as effective: one tablet within 72 hours after intercourse (the earlier the better) and one more tablet 12 hours after the first one.
- If you don't have this kind, you can use a higher dose of a daily contraceptive pill, such as Choice, Rigevidon, Microgynon, or Marvelon (any kind except Exluton). The dosage is: take four white tablets within 72 hours after intercourse (the earlier the better), and 12 hours after that, take another four white tablets.
- This drug can cause nausea and vomiting. If you vomit after taking it, you should take that dose again immediately. You can use an anti-nausea in order to ensure that your body absorbs the drug.



## Sexually transmitted diseases

Many people feel uncomfortable when hearing about sexually transmitted diseases, but in reality these diseases are rather widespread. It's easy to understand, just compare it to your throat. Your throat comes into contact with different kinds of disease-causing viruses and bacteria, and you easily come down with endless sore throats and flus. The reproductive organs are the same. When you have sex they come into contact with disease-causing bacteria, viruses, and germs, so they can become infected. There are more than twenty different sexually transmitted diseases: trichomonas, gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, genital herpes, chancroid, human papilloma virus, pubic lice, scabies, Hepatitis B, HIV, etc.

Hepatitis B and HIV are spread through sex but are not diseases of the reproductive organs. We need to speak separately about hepatitis B. This is a disease caused by one of the different viruses that cause hepatitis (A, B, C, D, E). Hepatitis B virus is spread rather easily through sex and blood, and many people are infected. Most people think that liver disease means some awful illness, jaundice, yellow eyes, then a long illness. It's actually not like that. People with those symptoms are only a minority of those with the virus, whereas the majority of people infected have no symptoms. There is no cure. The disease usually goes away on its own after several weeks, but of ten people infected, one carries the virus their entire life. That person may not experience any disease, and is called a healthy carrier. The virus can spread from that person to others. Some people come down with cirrhosis of the liver or liver cancer many years after infection, and may die of it. There is a hepatitis B vaccine, so you can get vaccinated. As for HIV, the virus reduces the ability to fight disease, gradually leading to death within several years. There is as yet no drug to prevent or cure it. We discuss HIV in the next section.

Most of the other diseases are diseases of the reproductive organs. Symptoms of them include: secretions of pus, pain on urination, itchiness, lesions, redness, sores, and warts. The difficult part is that about half of those infected have no symptoms. Thus you might become infected without realising it and thus not get treated, so the disease affects you later. You also might give it to someone else, with neither you nor the other person realising it. It's unfortunate that these diseases

are rather nasty. The most worrisome result is infertility, which gonorrhea and chlamydia can cause in both men and women. If syphilis goes undetected or untreated then after several years (or even a few decades), it can enter your internal organs and even lead to death. Herpes is an incurable disease. Once infected, from time to time you will get herpes sores, which are painful and unpleasant. Human papilloma virus can cause cervical and penile cancer. Some diseases can harm the child if a pregnant woman becomes infected. For example if a woman with gonorrhea gives birth, the child may have eye diseases requiring early treatment to prevent blindness. If a woman with chlamydia gives birth, the child may get very dangerous pneumonia.

Sexually transmitted diseases are worthy of fear because people find them embarrassing. The reproductive organs are just like any other body part, that is, they can become infected with disease. So why is it that you are comfortable reading an article about eye disease or measles, but you don't want anyone else to see you reading about reproductive diseases? That's the reason why so many youth are uninformed about diseases, ways to prevent them, the signs of disease, and where to go to get treated.

Because the effects of these diseases may be so great, it's best to prevent them. Always remember, there are only two ways to prevent these diseases:

- **don't have sex**
- **if you do, use a condom**

If you have had sex and your reproductive organs have an unusual sign such as secretion of pus, heavier secretions than usual, bad smell, itchiness, lumps, pain, redness, strange marks, pain or burning at urination, or more urine than usual, **go immediately to a dermatology hospital or centre**. Do not wait, as the disease can become incurable or can cause harm to your health, life, and future ability to have children. And don't listen to anyone who tells you to take this or that medicine, because **even if you have the same symptoms, the disease may be different, and the treatment is different**.

Also, before getting married, youth really should get tested for sexually transmitted diseases.



## HIV and AIDS

While HIV is entering every street and village of Vietnam, many Vietnamese youth still think that this disease is very far from them, and has no relation to them. We think that's unwise, because HIV can infect anyone, as long as that person comes into contact with the source of disease. If you are infected with HIV, you can still live healthfully for many years. During that time, HIV invades your immune system, destroying your ability to fight disease. Afterwards your ability to fight disease reduces greatly, leading you to have lengthy, incurable bouts of disease. That is the stage of AIDS. AIDS leads to death. That's the miserable part for the individual. As for everyone else, the hard part is that you live healthfully for several years, not knowing that you are carrying HIV, so you may spread it to others through blood contact or through sex, if either happens.

HIV is spread through three routes: sex, blood, and from mother to child during pregnancy, birth, or from breastfeeding. Being the future generation, youth cannot allow HIV to steal their life happiness. Prevent HIV through the following ways:

- Don't have sex. If you do, use condoms.
- Stay away from drugs, and if you are already injecting, use your own needle and syringe and try to stop using.
- Avoid other ways of coming into contact with blood.

At the same time, take this information to your friends, family, or anyone who doesn't yet know.

Playing, eating, or talking together, shaking hands, swimming in the same pool, using the same bathroom, going on the same vehicle, hugging, kissing (if you don't kiss inside the mouth when both people have sores or are bleeding)—none of these spread HIV. That means you can still have normal relations with your friends, nothing will change.

In the people around us, some have liver diseases, others lung disease or heart disease, and it's also quite possible that some have HIV. Friends share clothes, neighbours are with each other in difficult times. Those not yet infected should provide support to those infected.



If you are infected with HIV, it's a big shock. But it doesn't mean that everything comes to an end. The important thing is to live for each day, to make each day count. Continue studying, playing, and working as normal.

The only way to know if we have HIV is to get tested. The test looks for the antibodies that the body produces to fight HIV. Test results are:

**Positive:** you are infected with HIV.

**Negative:** there are two possibilities. One is that you are not infected with HIV. The other is that you are infected, but the quantity of antibodies is still small, so they don't yet show up on the test.

As for drugs to cure it, that's still just a hope. There are still no drugs that can eliminate HIV. Scientists around the world are conducting research and have found some drugs that slow down the development of HIV, but the results are still not reliable. There is also another obstacle for the Vietnamese, which is that the costs of using these drugs are very high, about 10-20,000 US dollars per person per year.

## APPENDICES

### Good books for teenagers

- *Viet cho tuoi moi lon (Written for youth)*, by Dr. Do Hong Ngoc.
- *Giao duc gioi tinh cho thanh thieu nien - nguoi dang ong lay vo (Sex education for adolescents-men getting married)*, by Dr. Tran Bong Son.
- *Nhung tat benh thong thuong trong lua tuoi hoc tro (Common diseases in school age youth)*, by Dr. Do Hong Ngoc.
- *Nhung tam long cao ca (Great souls)*, Edmondo de Amicis.
- *Khong gia dinh (Without family)*, by Hector Malaux.

### Answers to some questions about menstruation

*Does menstrual blood contain the egg?*

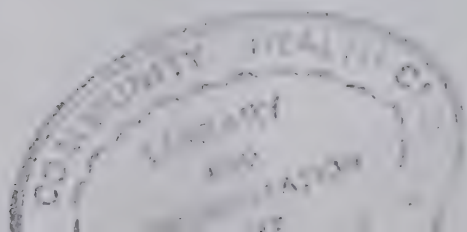
Nobody knows whether the egg comes out in menstrual blood or not. There are two theories: one that the egg leaves in the menstrual blood, one that when the egg isn't fertilised, the body reabsorbs it.

*How come some people's menstrual blood is bright red, some dark red, others brownish, and others have clots?*

Menstrual blood may not be like fresh blood because it consists not only of blood but also of other secretions and uterine lining tissue. Moreover, after the lining is shed, it is no longer nourished by the blood in the vein, and on the way from the uterus through the vagina and out, the colour can change. Clots in menstrual blood are just small pieces of the uterine lining. Don't worry about them.

*Is it true that when you get married your cramps will stop?*

Girls going through puberty have more menstrual cramps than adults, because their body is still developing and isn't yet stable. Maybe when they're older it will be better. It is true that some people find that their menstrual cramps are lighter when they have sex regularly or after they have children, but that's not a rule, because many married women with children still have a lot of cramps. There's no scientific proof as to whether or not getting married reduces menstrual cramps.



*Is it true that if you have a lot of cramps when you menstruate, it will be difficult to have children?*

That's not true. You may have a lot of cramps and still be completely normal. Many people have a lot of cramps and still give birth many times. Infertility is caused by certain sicknesses. You can't say that cramps mean it will be difficult to have children.

*Is it true that if you have a lot of cramps, birth will be very difficult?*

No. Many people often have cramps but give birth easily. There are also people who never have cramps but have trouble giving birth. Whether birth is easy or difficult is also not a rule for any woman. Maybe your previous child was easy and the next one is difficult, and maybe it's the other way around.

*Is it true that when girls menstruate their temper is abnormal?*

That's not true, because many girls don't experience anything different on the days they menstruate. But it is true that some girls are more tired or their temperament becomes a little more difficult on these days. There are also people who feel anxious, worried, etc. Families and friends should sympathise.

*Some people say that when you menstruate you shouldn't bathe, is that true?*

Previously in the countryside people rarely had private bathrooms, and bath water came from the well, pond, or river, so it was cold and not hygienic. When menstruating many women feel unpleasant, and some women caught colds bathing in those conditions. Thus many older people are afraid of bathing when they menstruate, and have come up with many fearful prospects, such as stomach ache, eyes becoming pale, often being cold when older, hair getting hard, hair shedding, etc. Of course none of those ideas has any scientific basis. Menstruation is a healthy and important biological happening, not a disease. During menstruation you should wash your body to keep it clean. If you feel tired, you should bathe with warm water in a place with no wind. For those who don't feel at all unpleasant, you can carry on daily activities as usual, without any changes.



*What should you eat and drink when menstruating?*

You should eat and drink like normal, eating many different things with plenty of nutrients. In particular you should eat a lot of green vegetables, and red meat like pork, beef, and liver, in order to make up for the iron lost in blood. Women and girls whisper to each other 1001 ways to diet: avoid salty foods, sweet foods, sour foods, seafood, cold foods, etc. If you applied all of that, you would have to go without food. According to science, menstruating does not require women to avoid any foods. There are only a couple of things some women's bodies react to during this period, like tea, coffee, and Coca-Cola, so if they make you feel bad, take a break from them for a few days.

*Is heavy activity dangerous?*

If you've heard anyone say that when menstruating you shouldn't do heavy work or ride a bicycle, that you should just rest and walk gently, don't rush to believe them. Certainly some people feel tired and want to rest more. But you should listen to the signals of your body. If you feel healthy like normal, of course you don't need to change your daily activities. Some women have the experience that playing sports when they menstruate makes them feel more comfortable.

*My grandmother says that when menstruating you shouldn't clean rice, wash dishes, or touch knives or scissors, because it will make your period last longer.*

That sounds like a fairy tale. Just ask others around you if they clean rice, wash dishes, and hold knives or scissors? So many women do housework every day of the month for the whole year. If it were true that you couldn't do those things, then every month women could rest a few days. How lucky that would be.

*Can you go to the pagoda when menstruating?*

Abstaining from going to the pagoda when menstruating is a religious issue. We know there are many different styles: the most strict is not setting foot inside the pagoda, then entering the pagoda but not lighting incense. The lightest is only praying for others, not for yourself. The general reason is the viewpoint that menses is dirty, so you shouldn't go to a holy place like a pagoda, for fear of committing a sin. But there are also many people who don't abstain, because they have other viewpoints. One woman in Danang told us:

*I think it's normal. It's just my blood. I'm not afraid that the Buddha will punish me. The Buddha would not be so difficult. The Buddha just appreciates my feelings.*

And a friend in Dalat thinks that:

*The nuns in the pagoda are also women and they menstruate in the pagoda, so there's probably no serious problem with it.*

We interviewed a nun in HCMC about this issue:

*In the pagoda, older people think that menstruating isn't clean so at that time they don't enter the main pagoda. But I know that it's a normal manifestation of women, it's not dirty, so I still light incense, read sacred books, and meditate like other days, there's nothing different. But perhaps when I meditate it's not as successful as on other days, because sometimes I feel uncomfortable, and don't concentrate as well.*

We don't dare discuss whether or not it's correct to abstain from going to the pagoda to pray, because that depends on the belief, perspective, and decision of each individual. We just want to emphasise that menstruation is a biological cycle, the sign of the ability of women to become mothers, and not something that makes women dirty or devils.

*There are times I want to do something better, then I remember that I've got my period, so I don't do it anymore.*

Giang's idea is truly isolated. She thinks menstruation is something to be ashamed of. It's easy to understand because some people still make slighting comments, full of disdain for this physiological manifestation of which we should be proud. They don't understand that it's only because women menstruated that they gave birth to them. We hope that sometime or other Giang will think about this in a different way.

*Authors*

Nguyen Quynh Trang  
Debra Efroymson  
Nguyen Khanh Linh

*Artists*

Nguyen Huu Khoa  
Nguyen Manh Hung

*Financial Support*

Canada Fund  
Royal Netherlands Embassy

This book is excerpted from PATH Canada's book  
*Let's Talk About Sexuality, Love, and Health*, by the same authors,  
and has been rewritten, changed, and supplemented.

Copyright © 1998 by PATH Canada







